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ABSTRACT

Potential pitfalls for women pursuing academic careers in psychology as they make the transition from graduate student to assistant professor are discussed, along with ways to avoid or minimize some of these difficulties. Basic statistics on women's representation in the profession are examined, including two common explanations of the data. Attention is focused on the role changes that accompany the transition from student to faculty member. It is argued that the professional role becomes increasingly incompatible with feminine sex-role expectations. A structural explanation for problems faced by women incorporates ideas about stereotypic sex-roles. The personal explanations center on reasons women themselves are not able to successfully climb the academic ladder. Major difficulties potentially faced by women include role conflicts, lack of support, and discrimination. Potential solutions involve adapting a personal strategy, changing the existing setting, and/or seeking out alternative settings (structural strategies). Barriers that may exist in graduate school include a paucity of female mentors and a lack of support for career development. After acquiring an academic job, problems may arise with affirmative action, networking, and sexual harassment. (SW)

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SURVIVING THE TRANSITION FROM GRADUATE STUDENT TO ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

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SURVIVING THE TRANSITION FROM GRADUATE STUDENT TO ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

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The purposes of the present paper are to expose potential pitfalls for women pursuing academic careers in psychology as they make the transition from graduate student to assistant professor and to suggest strategies for avoiding or minimizing some of these difficulties. First, I will examine basic statistics on women's representation in the profession and look at two common explanations of these data. The implications of taking a structrual over a personal perspective will be explored. Then, I will focus on the role changes that accompany the transition from student to faculty member and will argue that the professional role becomes increasingly incompatible with feminine sex-role expectations. I will conclude with suggestions for easing this transition that arise from a structural point of view.

Explaining Women's Status

Statistics consistently show that women with doctcral degrees are underrepresented in the upper echelons of the academic hierarchy. As recently as 1980, only 9% of Ph.D. full professors in psychology at doctoral degree-granting institutions, 19% of associate professors, 38% of assistant professors, and a full 50% of instructors were women (Russo, Olmedo, Stapp, & Fulcher, 1981). The figures stand in stark contrast to other data from the same year: 42% of doctorates awarded in psychology were earned by women, and fully one half of all graduate students enrolled in full-time doctoral programs were women. Let us explore two common explanations of these data: (a) structural and (b) personal (Riger & Galligan, 1980).

Structural Explanations

A structural explanation for the decreasing numbers of women from graduate student to assistant professor is systematic discrimination of women exercised by a sexist academic environment. The analogy offered by this view is that the profession is like a filter system with increasing numbers of women being sifted out as they progress up the academic hierarchy. Charges of such discrimination call for structural changes in both the ways students are trained and faculty are hired and evaluated in order to bring about egalitarianism.

Personal Explanations

The personal approach is to uncover reasons why women themselves are not able to successfully climb the academic ladder which is believed to be accessible equally to all qualified

candidates. In a brief review of these sorts of explanations, Emmons (1982) enumerates quantity and quality of publications, time in administrative positions, type of employing institution, job mobility (which may be limited by familial obligations), and discontinuity of work experiences as potential causes of this gender difference in promotion. Let us briefly review each of these.

The literature concerned with these personal variables is mixed. Evidence can be garnered to support the findings that women publish less frequently (Astin, 1972) and are cited less than men (Helmreich, Spence, Beane, Lucker, & Matthews, 1980; Emmons, 1982), while other studies conclude that women publish equal numbers of papers (Teghtsoonian, 1974) of comparable quality (Over, 1981). There is evidence that academic women are less likely than men to be exposed to administrative experiences (Astin, 1972). Although more married women consider job mobility to be problematic for themselves than do married men (Reagan, 1975), Emmons (1982) finds that actual mobility is not related to promotion for both men and women. Finally, concerning discontinuity, Astin (1972) finds that a full 79% of women doctorates have never interrupted their careers. In contrast, some authors point to the fact that women doctorates in psychology are more likely to be employed part-time than are men (Russo et al., 1981) and that this may coincide with child-rearing demands (Johnson & Stafford, 1974).

The correlation of any or all of the above variables with academic promotion does not verify these as <u>causes</u> of women's underrepresentation at the higher levels. For example, women indeed may be more likely to be employed part-time, but this may be the result of child-rearing demands (a personal explanation) or the consequence of biases against promoting women during their reproductive years based on the expectation that their service and commitment will be restricted by real or anticipated child-rearing responsibilites (a structural explanation). Women may not fill administrative roles either because women do not seek these appointments (a personal explanation) or because the selection process is biased against selecting women (a structural explanation).

<u>Conclusion</u>

The structural explanation incorporates ideas about stereotypic sex-roles and how these influence the academic careers of women doctorates. The further development of this structural theme is the central purpose of the present paper. It will be argued that progress up the traditional academic career ladder grows increasingly incompatible with the feminine sex-role. One reason then why men dominate the upper ranks is because these roles better suit their sex-role. This argument concludes that the standards of evaluation used by our current academic system are sexist and discriminatory and argues for structural change in

the standards upon which promotion decisions are made, not on changing women to conform to existent standards (also see Laws, 1975; Denmark, 1980).

Graduate Student to Assistant Professor: Changing Roles

Let us begin by tracing the career path of the traditional academic as he or she progresses along the path from graduate student to assistant professor. In particular, let us examine the roles demanded along the way with an eye to comparing these roles with that of our master status (Epstein, 1970), that is, our sex-role.

Graduate School

All of us have been students at some point in our lives and we know the role well. As students, we were passive, deferential, and externally evaluated. Men and women play this role in equal numbers, even at the advanced level in psychology (Russo et al., 1981), which attests to the gender neutrality of this role.

However, this role changes significantly when students are ABD (all but dissertation). With classes behind them, doctoral candidates take on a new role, that of apprentice to a profession. Now, the name of the game includes publishing, networking, and presenting which takes confidence, assertiveness, and the support of mentors. This may be the first time in a woman's academic career in psychology when she is confronted with role conflicts. Two barriers I encountered in graduate school at this stage of my own career development were: (a) a paucity of female mentors (Denmark, 1980) and (b) lack of support for my career development.

Mentors. The existence of few women mentors is the result of a downward spiral: with few women in the upper academic ranks, there are few mentors to show women how to manage their sex-role and professional role. To a novice for whom the new demands of a dissertation are inconsistent with her basic sex-role expectations and prior experiences, this inability to find mentors (or to choose among a limited array) can be discouraging.

In my case, I was in a department with equal numbers of male and female students but with only one of eight faculty in my area who was a woman. This lone woman was expected to help all these women students as well as weather her own tenure review. (Remember that women cluster at the lower levels and thus are likely to be less stably settled in their jobs than are men.) Needless to say, she was not a reliable source of support.

Even when women are granted tenure, it is in token numbers so that they automatically acquire all the negative consequences of token status, such as performance pressures, marginality, and role encapsulation (see Kanter, 1977; Laws, 1975). There is

evidence that when women play token roles these negative consequences inhibit the development of mentoring relationships so that even established women are unlikely to be able to offer sponsorship to other less advanced women (Yoder, Adams, Grove, & Priest, 1984).

Support. My second point is more difficult to document yet it seems to reflect the sentiments of many women doctoral candidates. I believe that faculty did not treat women's career aspirations with the same seriousness with which they responded to my male colleagues. I was part of a group of five women students who clustered together and struggled to format our vitae, meet people at professional meetings, discuss jobs, and share dissertation ideas. At the same time, we watched our male peers banter with faculty members about their dissertation over a beer, travel to meetings with their advisers, and consider post-docs to enhance their marketability. Although our women's support group was invaluable, we certainly did not possess the expertise embodied by the faculty and shared with our male counterparts.

All this occurred in a department with balanced numbers of women and men that can best be characterized as nonsupportive rather than negative or hostile. When a department is dominated by male students and faculty, Holahan (1979) finds that male faculty express the most negative attitudes toward women. In a balanced department, negative attitudes do not vanish, but they are mitigated. In any case, these attitudes contribute a stress in graduate school that is shouldered inequitably by women.

Conclusion. This speculation is substantiated by the statistics on success in graduate school. Although women compose half of the graduate population in psychology, they make up only 42% of the doctoral graduates in 1980 and a scant 25% of the Ph.D. members of APA (Russo et al., 1981). In contrast, women account for a full 45% of all masters level members of APA (Russo et al., 1981). Hence, the first filter indeed may be graduate school itself with equal numbers of women and men entering, more women than men leaving before the masters, and, even more disproportionatly, fewer women earning their doctorate. Again, this is consistent with changing role demands across the graduate student's training.

Becoming a Professional

After completing graduate school, the next career step is to acquire an academic job. Affirmative action laws are supposed to ensure equal opportunity in hiring, and in fact the data seem to bear this out as comparable percentages of women and men doctorates and masters employed full-time are distributed equally across community colleges, four-year institutions, and universities (Stapp & Fulcher, 1981). However, problems may arise with affirmative action, networking, and sexual harassment.

Affirmative Action. One abuse of affirmative action regulations which is rumored to occur is that women may be interviewed superficially only to fulfill these requirements and/or hired to fill temporary positions to increase artificially the sex ratio of a department. Of course, the converse is frequently touted by opponents of affirmative action who feel that it gives women an unfair advantage. (This of course ignores the fact that current employees benefitted from the systematic exclusion of female competitors from past job searches.) For a revealing look at one university's struggle with affirmative action, see Macaulay (1981).

Networking. Another concern among job applicants is the reported existence of an exlusive "old-boy" network. In a study of recruitment practices by employers registered at EPA, 24% of the respondents admitted to having a candidate in mind for the job prior to coming to the meetings (Kessler, McKenna, Russel, Stang, & Sweet, 1976). Furthermore, 74% report relying on friends and colleagues for recommendations of viable job candidates in at least some instances, and a full 30% of positions reportedly are filled this way. If anything, social desirability influences would argue that these figures are underestimates. In any case, networks do exist and access to them enhances one's marketability (see article by Rose).

The next question obviously concerns women's access to these networks. Denmark (1980) reports that status, not gender, is the most important factor in determining how many links a person needs to contact a target person. However, gender is influential in the linkages themselves. Those who have access to high status men and women are likely to be men. Denmark (p. 1063) uses these data in her 1980 presidential address to APA to call to question the "myth of equal opportunity."

Sexual Harassment. At its worst extreme, the incompatibility of the feminine sex-role with the professional role is most pronounced in cases of sexual harassment. This can occur at any stage of a woman's career when she is in a less powerful and dependent position (Somers, 1982), such as when she is a job applicant. In such cases, the harasser's expectations concerning the victim's sexuality and vulnerability color their professional relationship. The victim is no longer regarded by the perpetrator as a colleague, job candidate, or student, but rather as a stereotypic female (i.e., less powerful) sex object. This is one of the strongest possible affronts to a woman's professional role development.

Although there is no generally accepted definition of sexual harassment, harassing behaviors may include "verbal harassment, leering, offensive sexual remarks, unwanted touching, subtle pressure for sexual activity, overt demands for sexual activity, and physical assualt" (Somers, 1982, p. 28). All of these involve coercion on the part of the perpetrator (Reilly, Carpenter, Dull & Bartlett, 1982). For working women, estimates

of the incidence of harassment range from 20-60%, depending on the definition of harassment used (Brewer, 1982).

I was sexually harassed during my first job. I was told directly by a tenured faculty member that my tenuous one-year visiting position would continue more readily if I slept with him. My reactions ranged from initial self-blame to deep-seated anger and resentment. Like others, I felt emotionally and physically stressed, less satisfied with my job, and less willing to collaborate with my colleagues in the future (Jensen & Gutek, 1982; Livingston, 1982).

Remedial action can fall into personal and structural categories (Livingston, 1982). On an individual level, victims most frequently elect to avoid or ignore the perpetrator, although there is evidence that ignoring the problem is not effective in eliminating it (Silverman, 1976). Some victims, like myself, talk to their supervisors and they report that this action is most likely to "make things better" (Livingston, 1982). Also individuals need to be made aware of what harassment is and of their right to a harassment-free workplace.

On a structural level, grievance procedures and support systems need to be established or updated on our campuses. Effective grievance policies include: (a) informal procedures that allow mediation between parties and which protect their rights and ensure confidentiality and (b) formal steps to be taken if the problem is not otherwise resolved. The latter must include sanctions and the power to enforce them if necessary (Livingston, 1982). The potential for legal action and the employer's legal responsibility for harassment among its employees, in addition to the obvious ethics of such policies, give ample motivation for developing these procedures on our campuses. Furthermore, the simple development of such policies and the wide-spread publication and acceptance of them may deter potential harassers.

Suggestions for Easing the Transition

As we have seen, the major difficulties potentially faced by women include role conflicts, lack of support, and discrimination. Potential solutions may involve: (a) changing one's self (a personal strategy), (b) changing the existent setting, and/or (c) seeking out alternative settings (structural strategies).

Adapting

Changing one's self cannot compromise one's gender and beliefs. However, minimal adaptations are possible. One effective strategy is simple impression management, such as noting publications or community service work in the campus bulletin. Presenting one's self as competent by displaying high-status nonverbal behaviors also is effective (see Denmark, 1980).

Restructuring

Creating a compatible setting may be a more effective strategy (see the strategy of structural role redefinition which Hall's (1972) college-educated women found to be most satisfying). Volunteer to serve on search committees and support feminist candidates. Bolster your own supports, both on and off campus. Supportive groups are important in providing strength as well as in keeping you from being co-opted as you advance into the existent system by reminding you of your ultimate goal of egalitarianism. Not only look for mentors, but also be one. No matter where you are in your own career development, you have experiences worth passing on to others struggling behind you. Helping other women is a step toward changing the system as well as promoting your own career as these women advance and extend their own networks.

Finding Alternatives

If a setting does not fit you and change is unrealistic, seek alternatives. One minor, but helpful step in a job search is to delete your marital status from your vita and encourage others, especially men, to follow. If more people fail to provide information that may form a basis for discrimination, everyone will benefit. Use interviews to gather information. Remember that getting the job is only a small part of actually working and eventually being promoted in it. Is there support for your feminist viewpoint? (Using the word "feminist" is a good eliciting stimulus.) Consider the sex ratio of your work group and avoid being a token. Clarify your values; for example, if you want to teach and do a good piece of research every year or so, avoid the publish-or-perish atmosphere even though it may be more prestigious. Discover colleagues' interests and ask yourself if they fit your view of the world. A supportive environment is the best facilitator of a successful, satisfying career and the key may be to find the right one for you.

Conclusion

In sum, what some regard as the career ladder for doctorates in psychology may actually be a filter system for women who are sifted through a series of filters which eliminate numbers of women at each step along the way because of biased sex-role incompatibilities. The ladder is something to be climbed; it assumes equal opportunity and rewards individuals' personal perserverance and abilities. The filter system is structurally biased, eliminating qualified candidates by virtue of an ascribed gender role, not ability. The filter system clearly shortchanges both women and the profession which loses competent workers. And, if this analysis as well as those of Denmark (1980) and Laws (1975) are valid, the filter analogy and structural explanations of women's underrepresentation in academe are indeed accurate representations of our current academic system.

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